

Los Alamos

NATIONAL LABORATORY

research note

Applied Theoretical & Computational Physics
Transport Methods Group
<http://www-xdiv.lanl.gov/XTM/>

To/MS: Distribution
From/MS: H. Lichtenstein (X-TM)/D409
Phone/FAX: 7-3926/5-5538
Email: hal@lanl.gov
Symbol: XTM-RN (U) 98-001
Date: January 13, 1998

Status of X-TM Open Web

INFORMATION & CONCEIT IN CYBERSPACETIME — A RETROSPECTIVE

Preface

My somewhat inflammatory choice of sub-title was calculated to entice the reader to read further, but is not entirely divorced from my thoughts on the subject. My objective is to summarize and reflect on my experiences over the past several years as the maintainer (WebMaster, if you will) of my Group's site on the World Wide Web (WWW or Web). It has been a rewarding learning experience, which has given me insights to technical and psychological issues that pervade our interactivity with our fellow (wo)man.

Around the time of the realignment that created Group X-CI (the Realignment), my colleague Art Forster urged me to document my technical Web experiences, so as to produce a status report. This note is the result of that (belated) effort.

1. Introduction

The Web emerged from cyberspacetime around 1994, shortly before my own involvement with it through the so-called "SuperLAB Project." I just happened to be in the right place at that time, and the leadership of this Project's X-TM portion was offered to me by my Group Office (it was Pat Soran, who might have been Bob Little's Deputy at the time; one could look it up). I coined "cyberspacetime" because I was immediately struck by the inflationary rate of evolution for the Web. To say that I was intrigued by its possibilities would be an understatement.

Just prior to the Web's inflationary burst, it was not uncommon to think of documentation in terms of hard copy. Moreover, it was common practice to charge a fee for hard-copy documentation, not only to defray the cost of production but also to earn a profit. I personally felt that the latter practice was unbecoming this institution, one that had been referred to as the "Crown Jewel" of American scientific research. I believe that an undocumented project/result is not worth much. Today, most major publications are on line; many are free of access charges. The Web is the ultimate public library, a wonderful concept.

2. Weaving at a Furious Pace

At first, the proverbial handful of people knew the compound term of the acronym **http**. Today, several handfuls know it (writer's license), but billions understand that it is the prefix of the ubiquitous Web-site address (which, technically, is the uniform resource locator, or URL. But who cares, am I right?).

Grade school students have Web sites. Major corporations have sites; minor corporations; government agencies; churches (I think the Vatican has one; you could look it up with a search engine); royals have sites; racists. I can't think of a single class of people or organization that's not on line, or *wired*. This is a revolutionary concept.

3. Unweaving Conceit

I have observed that the juxtaposition of a revolutionary concept and universal accessibility engenders conceit. After all, if first-graders can create a Web site, how tough can it be? It's true; the process is elementary. It is also true that many Web authors are dilettantes, and a vast number of sites comprise unadulterated garbage.

A worthy Web site has certain attributes: content; accessibility; content; logical (intuitive) structure; content; expansion potential (a living repository of content); scrupulous attention to detail; content; a minimum of gratuitous distractions; and content.

content Substantive material, not just the obligatory "hotlist."

accessibility Presentation of content (which see) in a manner conducive to efficient browsing.

In the stone age of interactive computing, (*i.e.*, when microcomputers were driven by BASIC, and blink-planes were bastardized for cache memory), it was estimated that a user's intolerance-threshold was a 3-second response time. Today, there is essentially zero tolerance for delay.

logical structure A generalization of accessibility (which see); the enabling of progressively more-detailed investigation of content in a user-friendly manner.

expansion potential The concept of a living document is well established. On-line documentation will ordinarily require care and feeding.

attention to detail A worthy Web site is not sloppy (read *slappy*, as in *slapped-together*); all the i's should be dotted.

minimum distractions This attribute is probably the most controversial; one man's pizzazz is another woman's pain-in-the- , *er*, distraction. But *do* try to balance gadgets and accessibility (which see).

Yes, it is trivial to slap-together a Web page. But the resulting *pancake* will likely be indistinguishable from its by-product of digestion, both in appearance and virtual odor.

4. Status Snapshot

The instant that a status for a Web site (that is actively developed) is reported, it becomes obsolete. A time-stamped status is the best one can provide.

But, since I had shifted into a “minimum maintenance mode” for the X-TM Web site, around the time of the Realignment, a status report now becomes relevant for a significant period. It is also important to point out that a major portion of my Web authoring has been frozen and handed over to Group X-CI (primarily, the MCNP and the LCS sub-sites).

4.1 A brief digression

Lest I be labeled a hypocrite, I must acknowledge at the outset that my personal *nontechnical* Web site is really part of the great unwashed. In “developing” it, I had not bothered to adhere to my own guidelines for worthiness, because my *nontechnical* Web site has only served as a test-bed in my learning mode. My real focus has been, and, to a less-active extent, continues to be the **X-TM** Web site at URL:

<http://www-xdiv.lanl.gov/XTM/>

(Oh yes, for the curious, http stands for hyper-text transfer protocol).

To partially compensate for the emotional void created by my shift to minimum maintenance mode (it really has been a labor of love), I have established a personal *technical* Web site to produce a living document for my own technical efforts:

<http://www.lanl.gov/home/hal>

My technical site strives to be worthy.

4.2 Status of X-TM Web site

A descriptive metric for Web “status” is the frequency of visits or recorded “hits.” Of course, there is no easy way to distinguish between the serious visitor and the casual Web surfer, with the exception of *restricted-access* sub-sites that bar all but those with legitimate need-to-know. An example of the latter are the so-called “work-in-progress” sub-sites, which are restricted to the project-participants and stakeholders.

Table I shows a sampling of the sub-sites within the X-TM Web. This is *not* a complete accounting of our Web-site’s contents and visits thereto.

All this without benefit of pornography, I might add. :-{)

TABLE I
 Sampling of Sub-sites in the X-TM Open Web

X-TM Web @ http://www-xdiv.lanl.gov/XTM/			
Sub-site	Home/Descendant/Access	Inception of Counter	# hits
X-TM Web	Group Home Page	August 28, 1995	12,318
Staff Info	Home	September 5, 1995	2,614
Gen Info	Home	August 28, 1995	5,081
	Searching	March 1, 1996	16,172
	US Government Info	September 15, 1995	763
	Finding people	February 25, 1996	1,085
	Internet Workshop	August 28, 1995	343
Resources	Home	September 15, 1995	959
	X-TM Info Warehouse	February 12, 1997	478
DANTSYS	Home	August 28, 1995	980
MC Refs	Home	September 15, 1995	2,194
Applications	Home	September 15, 1995	1,254
X-TM Docs	Restricted Access (RA)	October 4, 1996	352
MCNP	Home (frozen site)	August 29, 1995	7,550
	Forum	August 30, 1995	3,731
	Users Info	September 20, 1995	2,731
	On-line Manual	July 23, 1997	774
	LA Reports Info	June 4, 1996	1,314
	Resource Warehouse	August 29, 1997	660
LCS	Home (frozen site)	September 15, 1995	2,538
	Forum	December 12, 1996	711
	Users Info	December 20, 1996	391
	On-line Manual	July 14, 1997	243
	QA Benchmarking	November 3, 1995	400
SuperLab Proj	Home	September 6, 1995	737
MC21 Proj	Home	October 13, 1995	4,781
	Purpose	October 13, 1995	1,211
	Participants	October 15, 1995	1,009
	Forum	October 13, 1995	635
	Announcements	February 23, 1996	782
	Meetings	November 8, 1995	454
	Workshop	April 8, 1996	1,061
	Mature Documentation	May 17, 1996	1,550
	Related Resources	October 15, 1995	724
	Work-in-Progress (RA)	April 10, 1996	1,010

5. Remarks

The X-TM Web evolved over a period of some $3\frac{1}{2}$ years to date. Though my earliest counter is dated August 28, 1995, the site predates these counters by about a year. I can't recall exactly when I started working on SuperLAB, but my first status report is dated October 26, 1994.

<http://www-xdiv.lanl.gov/XTM/under/stats.html#941026>

A curiosity that will be noted by some diligent readers is that the Group Home Page has not logged the most visits. The current X-TM record is held by the search page I introduced that implements access to Alta Vista's search engine locally.

<http://www-xdiv.lanl.gov/XTM/docs/search/altavista.html>

Moreover, these hits are likely to be purposeful.

The forums that I established for MCNP, LCS, and the MC21 Project (Monte Carlo Methods for the 21st Century) serve as archives for the email communications of the corresponding email distribution lists, which I also established. My procedure for archiving has, however, been leap-frogged by Web developers who have produced industrial strength software. With the resources being brought to bear on professional Web development, an amateur like me using *vi* doesn't stand a chance. But I did have the right idea.

HL:hal

Distribution:

R. J. Juzaitis, X-DO, MS B218
W. H. Reed, X-DO, MS B218
T. E. Booth, X-CI, MS F663
J. F. Briesmeister, X-CI, MS F663
R. A. Forster, X-CI, MS F663
S. C. Frankle, X-CI, MS F663
R. C. Little, X-CI, MS F663
R. E. Prael, X-CI, MS F663
D. G. Shirk, X-CI, MS F663
P. D. Soran, X-CI, MS F663
J. E. Morel, X-TM, MS D409
H. G. Hughes, X-TM, MS D409
T. M. Evans, X-TM, MS D409
J. M. McGhee, X-TM, MS D409
G. L. Olson, X-TM, MS D409
W. T. Urban, X-TM, MS D409
T. J. Urbatsch, X-TM, MS D409
H. Lichtenstein, X-TM, MS D409
X-TM file